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USDA FOR FAS/FRANK LEE, CHUCK ALEXANDER, USDA FOR
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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [NI](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: GMO RICE: GOG WOULD WELCOME PUBLIC FORUM TO
CLARIFY MISCONCEPTIONS

REF: SECSTATE 136471

¶1. SUMMARY: Ambassador Bridgewater met with GoG Minister of Food and Agriculture Ernest Debrah on November 28, 2006 to address GoG concerns about American rice imports to Ghana. The Minister indicated many of the explanations he had received about the August shipment, which contained trace amounts of regulated genetically engineered rice, were too technical. He was receptive to the idea of a televised forum during which the public could hear an informed panel discuss the situation to demystify any misconceptions about the safety of genetically modified rice, specifically, and agricultural biotechnology, generally. END SUMMARY.

¶2. BACKGROUND: In August 2006, a shipment of U.S. rice to Ghana was found to have trace amounts of regulated genetically engineered rice. Despite repeated proactive communication by Embassy Accra with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to clarify the situation and emphasize the safety of the rice for consumption (ref 136471), confusion remains both within the Ministry and the Ghanaian public. Negative press articles continue to appear in local media about genetically modified American rice exports to Ghana; a November 27 front page headline in the Business and Financial Times suggested Ghanaians "beware of banned U.S. rice." The environmental NGO Friends of the Earth recently organized a protest outside of the Ministry on this topic. END BACKGROUND.

¶3. On November 28, AgAttache (FASLagos) and EconOff accompanied the Ambassador to a meeting with Minister of Food and Agriculture Debrah, who said the information his Chief Director received from the Embassy was very technical and requested a simpler explanation on the issue. The Ambassador explained that biotechnology is an important tool in advancing agriculture today and stressed that the rice the U.S. exports to Ghana and to the rest of the world is also eaten by American consumers. The Ambassador also told the Minister that the product in question had gone through an extensive scientific review under the U.S. food safety regulatory system and was deemed safe for use in food and the environment. She explained that, as of November 24, 2006, Liberty Link Rice 601 was deregulated by the U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and can now be used commercially in the U.S.

¶4. Minister Debrah asked how the regulated strain found its way into the food chain. AgAttache told the Minister that USDA is conducting an investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the release.

¶5. Minister Debrah was receptive to our explanation. He said agricultural biotechnology is a new scientific field and many

people in Ghana lack accurate information about this issue. The Ambassador told the Minister that the Embassy would be happy to work with his Ministry to better inform the public about agricultural biotechnology. Minister Debrah welcomed the idea and said he would instruct his staff to work with the Embassy to organize a televised information session on agricultural biotechnology, which would help to clarify any outstanding confusion about agricultural biotechnology.

BRIDGEWATER